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BOOK REVIEWS

CHAUCER AND HIS POETRY: LECTURES DELIVERED IN 1914 ON THE PERCY TURNBULL MEMORIAL FOUNDATION IN THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY. By George Lyman Kittredge. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 230 pages. 1915.

He who was a young man at Johns Hopkins in the consulship of Harrison may fitly adapt Ben Jonson's tribute to a great contemporary: "There happened in my time one noble speaker. No man ever spoke more neatly, more pressly, more weightily or suffered less emptiness, less idleness, in what he uttered. No member of his speech but consisted of his own graces. He commanded where he spoke." This gracious command of hearers and of theme, which enlisted our large confidence when Professor Kittredge discoursed on the English romances to us *doctorandi* of twenty-five years ago, is assuredly no less evident, when, in the light of deeper experience and in the warmth of an even more intense sympathy with his subject, he speaks now to our successors on the benches of *Chaucer and His Poetry*. In these six lectures, which worthily sustain the traditions of the Percy Turnbull Foundation, linked in the minds of many of us with memories of Stedman and Jebb and Tyrrell and Brunetière, mastery of matter loses nothing in impressiveness by his alliance with geniality of manner. Of the Babylonish dialect of the pedagogue, of the impersonality of the statistician of "academic" remoteness from the life of everyday, —of all those traits which rightly or wrongly are made the reproach of the philologist in general and of the mediævalist in chief, the reader will happily find no trace in this little volume of some two hundred pages. Here, instead, is a charming intimacy well befitting the interpreter of so intimate a poet as Geoffrey Chaucer.

Professor Kittredge's first lecture on "The Man and His Times" is largely devoted to the removal of misconception. Time-honored legends of Chaucer's life have long since been laid to rest by our fuller knowledge of fourteenth-century records; old notions of his rude speech and ruder rhyming have been shattered by our proper understanding of Middle English

grammar and metre; but conventional estimates of his art owe their mischievous longevity to our ignorance of mediæval thought and perspective. The lecturer dismisses with large reason such catchwords as 'naïf,' 'quaint,' 'modern,' 'convincing'; he utters a necessary *caveat* against the traditional but uncoördinate division of Chaucer's poetical activity into three rigid periods; he emphasizes the poet's regularity, conciseness, and sense of proportion, and, above all, his love of the world of men; and he exalts his power as a delineator of character. In all this the limitations of the lecture system enforce a sketchiness which sometimes fails to satisfy. To the reviewer there seems to be a far larger significance in the difference between Chaucer's mediæval outlook and our own than in the superficial resemblance of external events in widely distant centuries, and there appears a very real danger in the present tendency to minimize these differences. Our recognition of Chaucer's sense of design, to which full justice has not yet been accorded by modern readers, must not blind us to the generous discursiveness of *The House of Fame* and many of the *Canterbury Tales*. And the master's delineation of character is far more dependent upon the humors of class-satire as revealed in the irony of narrative assignments than the present volume makes evident.

The second lecture, that on *The Book of the Duchess*, is so finely conceived and so pleasantly executed as to furnish partial compensation for the absence from our lecturer's scheme of things of two works of far greater worth, *The Parliament of Birds* and *The Legend of Good Women*. When, with such delightful sympathy and suggestiveness, we are led along "the wavering vistas of a dream," is it not ungrateful to be troubled by a doubt? And yet the reader cannot forbear the question whether much of this dream psychology is not of modern making. Are we warranted in drawing a sharp distinction between "the childlike dreamer" and Geoffrey Chaucer? As Mr. Kittredge himself makes clear, the sleeper and wide-eyed questioner borne by the gold-plumed eagle among the stars to Fame's house is assuredly "Geoffrey," married man, reader of Ovid and of many books, maker of reckonings in the London customs. The daisy-lover, who meets in the meadows of dream Cupid and the

nineteen good women of the Legend, is assuredly, if this Prologue is to be trusted, the author of the chief works that bear Chaucer's name. Why then suppose that the dreamer who beholds under the oak trees nought more wonderful than a strong man's grief, is a mere "creature of the imagination"? Thin indeed is the mask that hides John of Gaunt's protégé and friend. And one thing more: "To assign an actual locality," says Hawthorne in the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, exposes the romance to an inflexible and exceedingly dangerous species of criticism by bringing fancy pictures almost into positive contact with the realities of the moment." Yet word-play and history are in too close accord to forbid the conjecture that "the long castle with walls white on a rich hill" is that Richemont or Richmond of Northern Yorkshire which gave John of Gaunt his early title and which remained in his keeping until 1372, three years after the death of Blanche. Thus Chaucer's early work, like Spenser's, has some color of the North that he knew in youth.

Professor Kittredge deserves our thanks for his unhesitating rejection of Ten Brink's autobiographical interpretation of the allegory of *The House of Fame*. If Chaucer thus unlocked his heart, the less Chaucer he! To the reviewer there seems quite as little reason to regard this long-sustained vision as a prologue to a story or to a group of stories—indeed as anything else than what our lecturer finally proclaims it to be, "a humorous study of mankind from the point of view of a Ruling Passion." Can we altogether justify, by pleading its accord with the machinery of love-visions, anything so remote from the poet's central thought, the dominant desire of fame, as the lengthy paraphrase of Dido's unhappy story? Right here a pretty strong protest might be framed against the exaltation of Chaucer by modern standards of unity and sequence, of which he seemingly "ne roghte nat a bene." In that day what was or was not episodic?

If we are to read aright the characters of the *Troilus*, Professor Kittredge shows that we must interpret that great poem in the terms of courtly love. This truth Mr. Dodd, working under his master's eye, had already demonstrated in his interesting Harvard dissertation. Viewed in the broad light of

mediæval ideals of courtship, Cressida is neither victim nor adventuress—farewell to that ungallant anachronism!—but a tender-hearted woman whose sin lies not in her love for Troilus but in her faithlessness to that love. Equally just are the lecturer's estimates of Troilus and Pandarus, likewise so often misunderstood. The lover is a wise and seasoned warrior, the go-between is a loyal friend, faithful even at the cost of honor. The contrast at the poem's close between the vain love of the world and the saving love of Christ is regarded by Mr. Kittredge as an outspoken rejection of the courtly code, the mainspring of the story's action. Such a contrast, it may be added, reigns in the juxtaposition of Canterbury tales of profane and of holy love, and appears incongruously enough in Cupid's praise of the virgin-martyr Margaret in Christine de Pisan's famous "Letter," englished by Hoccleve. It is easy for a modern critic to make too much of the linking of the tragedy of character with the world-tragedy in the background. Chaucer was no Æschylus.

To the proper interpretation of the *Canterbury Tales*, the theme of the fifth and sixth lectures, Professor Kittredge has brought large aid by his insistence here and elsewhere upon the self-revelation of the pilgrims through their stories and upon the "human comedy" enacted in the inter-relation of tales hitherto viewed apart. If, however, he had carried to its legitimate conclusion his contention that these stories must be viewed dramatically, he could not have failed to note the delicious irony of many of Chaucer's assignments:—a Summoner sputtering with rage yet making wrath ridiculous in an *exemplum*; a chiding Manciple illustrating in his narrative tale-bearing, then so closely linked with chiding that it often bore its name, and denouncing the wicked tongue; a tavern-haunting Pardoner inveighing against tavern-sins; a philter-giving Physician exposing lechery; a Lawyer detraction, and a Nun sloth. That the combination of tales in a Marriage Group is an important phase of Chaucer's design is triumphantly demonstrated, but why exclude from this category such pointed discussions of the themes of wife's counsels and sex sovereignty as those in the Melibeus, the Nun's Priest's Tale and the Parson's sermon? That not only the

woman question but class satire is a large factor in the clashes of pilgrims and in their choice of tales, Professor Kittredge is certainly aware; but how deeply such antipathies as those between the tenant Miller and the rent-taking Reeve, between shopkeeping Cook and purchasing Manciple, influenced Chaucer, he nowhere discloses. So sympathetic is the Critic's appreciation of the traits of the several pilgrims that one hesitates to demur. To the Prioress he is perhaps too kind. In the light of La Tour Landry's "ensample" of the fourteenth-century lady who, heedless of the needy poor, cherished with rich food her little dogs, and of contemporary protest against monks who gave only to their hounds, can we overlook the tinge of irony in Chaucer's portrait? At tender hearts of women mockers have always had their fling. What shrieks are cast to pitying Heaven, "when husbands and when lap-dogs breathe their last"! It is surely not the least of the Pardoner's triumphs that with all his cards face-up on the table, he should still play his game so deftly as to "blear the eyne" of a clear-sighted commentator. Flagrant artistry this, but shall we, though warned, mistake sheer professional efficiency for a spasm of virtue? The rascal's soul is lost beyond even a moment's recovery.

The six lectures of Professor Kittredge are not only of the head but of the heart,—scholarly, of course, and richly human as well. The slender volume that contains them has given one reader very real delight, and he closes it with the regret that he was not seated on the benches during that spring week in Baltimore.

FREDERICK TUPPER.

THE SOCIAL PROBLEM. By Charles A. Ellwood. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$1.25.

The reader who wishes an excellent criticism of the basic influences at work in our present social life will find it in this book by Professor Ellwood. In the introductory chapter the author defines the social problem as the problem of human living together. For human beings to live together harmoniously it is necessary to have some mutually accepted scale of values to regulate conduct. If this mutually accepted scale of values does not exist, conflict